

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SAN SA 00508 081625Z

43

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 478

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

/USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 0508

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PINT, ES

SUBJ: ELECTION ROUND-UP

1. SUMMARY. AT THE MID-POINT OF THE 1974 LEGISLATIVE/MUNICIPAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN, THERE IS STILL LITTLE EVIDENCE THAT ANY OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE STIRRED MUCH POPULAR INTEREST IN THE CONTEST AND ALL FEAR A HEAVY RATE OF ABSTENSION. NO EXCITING ISSUES OR PERSONALITIES HAVE EMERGED AND THE VARIOUS POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE GENERALLY FOLLOWED THEIR TRADITIONAL PLATFORMS. LITTLE COMMENT IS HEARD ABOUT THE ELECTIONS OUTSIDE OF PARTISAN POLITICAL CIRCLES. THE MAJOR UNKNOWN IS THE IMPACT OF THE RETURN IN LATE FEBRUARY OF FORMER OPPOSITION PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE DUARTE WILL HAVE IN STIMULATING ENTHUSIASM AMONG THE LEFT OF CENTER OPPOSITION FORCES. PRELIMINARY PREDICTIONS FOR THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY RACE INDICATE THAT IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THE PCN CAN RETAIN TWO THIRDS OF THE SEATS IF THE OTHER PARTIES ARE ALLOWED TO REGISTER AND CAMPAIGN FREELY AND IF THE VOTE COUNT IS FAIRLY HONEST. END SUMMARY.

2. WITH LITTLE MORE THAN A MONTH TO GO BEFORE THE MARCH 10

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 SAN SA 00508 081625Z

LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, POLITICAL ACTIVITY IS FINALLY PICKING

UP SOMEWHAT BUT HAS YET TO GENERATE MUCH POPULAR INTEREST OR CONCERN. THE LOCAL CAMPAIGNS FOR MAYORS AND CITY COUNCILMEN OPENOFFICIALLY FEBRUARY 8 AND MAY STIMULATE SOME ADDITIONAL INTEREST SINCE THIS YEAR'S CAMPAIGN THUS FAR LACKS EXCITING NATIONAL ISSUEK OR PERSONALITIES ON WHICH VOTERS CAN FOCUS (THE COST OF LIVING QUESTION APPEARS TO BE THE ONLY ONE WITH ANY POPULAR APPEAL THUS FAR.) FEB. 8 ALSO MARKS THE DEADLINE FOR THE SUBMISSION OF PARTY TICKETS TO THE ELCTORAL COUNCIL (CCE) WHICH MUST APPROVE THEIR QUALIFICATIONS (IF ANY CANDIDATE ON A MUNICIPAL OR LEGISLATIVE SLATE FAILS TO FULFILL LEGAL REQUIREMENTS, THAT ENTIRE SLATE IS REJECTED. THE NOMINATING PARTY HAS THREE DAYS TO CORRECT THE TICKET BUT ANY SUBSEQUENT CCE REJECTION IS FINAL AND THE PARTY IS DEPRIVED OF ITS CANDIATES IN THAT PARTICULAR RACE.) GIVEN THE QUESTIONABLE RULINGS OF THE GOVT CONTROLLED CCE IN THE 1972 LEGISLATIVE/MUNICIPAL ON CERTAIN UNO SLATES, ALL OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE AWAITING ITS DECISIONS WITH MORE THAN PASSING INTEREST. PCN LEADERS PRIVATELY INDICATE THAT THE GOVT HAD DECIDED NOT TO CHALLENGE ANY OPPOSITION NOMINATIONS THIS YEAR PERHAPS TO AVOID DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM OF ELECTRAL FRAUD TO THICH IT WAS SUBJECT IN 72.

3. OPPOSITION CONCERN WILL ALSO CENTER ON THE ATTITUDE OF THE SECURITY FORCES TOWARD THEIR CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES AND CANDIDATES. PDC LEADERS ALLEGE THAT SOME OF THEIR ACTIVISTS IN THE INTERIOR OF THE COUNTRY OCCASIONALLY HAVE BEEN HARRASSED BY THE NATIONAL GUARD BUT THUS FAR CONSIDER THESE ISOLATED INCIDENTS AND NOT A CAMPAIGN TACTIC BY THE GOVT. PRES MOLINA HAS REPORTEDLY TOLD THE SECURITY FORCES NOT TO INTERFERE WITH THE CAMPGIN OR THE ELECTIONS BUT THIS POLICY COULD CHANGE IF THE OPPOSITION APPEARS TO BE MAKING REAL HEADWAY.

4. CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES HAVE THUS FAR BEEN LIMITED TO TV PROGRAMS AND OCCASIONAL SMALL RALLIES. THE PCN CONTINUES TO FEATURE ITS LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY CANDIDATES ON NIGHTLY TV SHOWS WHO EXTOL THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE GOVT'S "MEN OF ACTION". FILM CLIPS OF VARIOUS PUBLIC WORKS ARE FEATURED AND VARTICULAR PRIDE IS TAKEN IN THE CERRON GRANDE DAM PROJECT IN VIEW OF THE GLOBAL ENERGY CRISIS. FEATURING ITSELF AS THE ONLY TRULY NATIONALIST PARTY, THE PCN IS ATTACKING THE LEFT OF CENTER UNO COALITION FOR ITS COMMUNIST AND CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 SAN SA 00508 081625Z

FOREIGN TIES AND ADMONISHES THE SMALL, RIGHT OF CENTER PPS FOR ITS POLITICAL PRETENSION. CAMPAIGN PROMISES BY THE PCN ARE MINIMAL; IT IS STANDING ON THE RECORD OF ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE MOLINA ADMINISTRATION BUT HAS LITTLE TO SAY ABOUT FUTURE PLANS, PROGRAMS, OR REFORMS. TO DATE, PRES MOLINA HAS PLAYED NO OPEN ROLE IN SUPPORT OF THE PCN.

5. THE PRINCIPLE OPPOSITION TO PNC REMAINS THE UNO COALITION

DOMINATED BY THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS. ITS CAMPAIGN HAS GOTTEN OFF TO A VERY SLOW START WITH ONLY A FEW TV SHOWS AND ONE ROUTINE RALLY IN THE CAPITAL. (ONE PDC LEADER CLAIMS THAT THEY ARE HOLDING BACK ON PUBLICITY EXPENDITURES UNTIL THEY ARE ASSURED THAT THE CCE WILL APPROVE THEIR SLATES.) HOWEVER, UNO PLANS TO RUN MUNICIPAL TICKETS IN MOST COMMUNITIES AND WILL FIELD LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATES IN ALL DEPARTMENTS EXCEPT AHUACHAPAN WHERE IT CONCLUDED AN UNLIKELY MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE WITH THE CONSERVATIVE FUID. PREDICTABLY, THE UNO FAULTS THE MOLINA GOVT FOR ITS ALLEGED REPRESSIVE TACTICS, FOR THE HIGH COST OF LIVING AND FOR THE DISPUTED 72 ELECTIONS. IN AN EFFORT TO ATTRACT ALL ANTI-GOVT VOTERS UNO SPOKESMEN HAVE ATTEMPTED ALSO TO DISCREDIT THE PPS WITH ACCUSATIONS THAT IT IS SECRETLY IN LEAGUE WITH THE PCN.

6. THE PPS, WHICH CLAIMS IT WILL FIELD LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATES IN AT LEAST EIGHT DEPARTMENTS, HAS CAMPAIGNED LITTLE THUS FAR. STANDING BY ITS TRADITIONAL PLATFORM OF THE PARTY OF THE WORKINGMAN, IT CRITICIZES THE GOVT FOR ITS STATIST POLICIES AND THE UNO COALITION FOR ITS LINKS WITH KNOWN COMMUNISTS. THNBRSV, WHOSE CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN LIMITED TO ONE NEWSPAPER AD THUS FAR, WILL ONLY RUN LEGISLATIVE AND MUNICIPAL CANDIDATES (THE LATTER MAINLY UNO ACTIVISTS) IN AHUACHAPAN AND POSSIBLY IN THE CAPITAL. SO JSOLE CAMPAIGN STATEMENT SHARPLY ATTACKED INDIVIDUAL PCN LEADERS FOR PERSONALLY BENEFITING FROM THE FRUITS OF THE COUNTRY'S FIRST LAND RECLAMATION DISTRICT, EVIDENTLY TO GENERATE SOME CONTROVERSY (AND FREE PUBLICITY) FOR ITS CAUSE (A-19).

7. AS TO ELECTION PROSPECTS, MOST POLITICAL OBSERVERS ARE HESITANT TO OFFER FIRM PREDICTIONS AT THIS TIME PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF THE PUBLIC APATHY ABOUT THE CONTEST AND THE PROSPECTS OF CONSIDERABLE ABSTENTIONISM. THE PCN AND OPPOSITION PARTIES ALIKE ARE FINDING IT HARD TO GENERATE ENTHUSIASM AMONG THE RANK AND FILE; SOME CONTEND THAT THIS STEMS FROM DISILLUSIONMENT AMONG VOTERS

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 SAN SA 00508 081625Z

FOLLOWING THE 1972 ELECTIONS (THIS IS THE UNO AND PPS VIEW), OTHERS, AND PARTICULARLY THE PCN, THAT THE INTENSE POLITICAL ACTIVITY TWO YEARS AGO AND THE SUBSEQUENT MOBILE GOVT FORAYS OF PRES MOLINA HAVE JADED THE POPULACE.

8. INDEED, OUTSIDE OF POLITICAL CIRCLES, LITTLE IS HEARD ABOUT THE ELECTIONS. TO THE MILITARY IT IS LARGELY A "NON-ISSUE" WITH WHICH THE MILITARY INSTITUTION SHOULD NOT BECOME OPENLY INVOLVED. IN THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY TOO THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE SPECULATION OR INTEREST. ITS LEADERS ASSUMED THAT THE PRES AND MILITARY WILL ASSURE A PCV VICTORY ONE WAY OR ANOTHER AND THAT THEY WILL NOT ALLOW CAMPAIGNING TO GET OUT OF HAND AND DISTURB PUBLIC ORDER. THEY ARE ALSO PLEASED WITH ASSURANCES ALLEGEDLY RECEIVED FROM THE GOVT THAT NO RADICAL REFORMS WILL BE ANNOUNCED OR PROMISED DURING THE CAMPAIGN THAT WOULD AGITATE THE POPULACE OR ADVERSELY AFFECT THEIR IMMEDIATE

INTERESTS.

9. BARRING SOME UNEXPECTED NEW POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT, THE COURSE OF THE REMAINDER OF THE CAMPAIGN MAY DEPEND LARGELY ON THE RETURN OF FORMER UNO PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE DUARTE. HE IS NOW SCHEDULED TO ARRIVE IN SAN SALVADOR FROM CARACAS FEBRUARY 22, ACCORDING TO PDC SOURCES, WILL LEAD RALLIES IN THE PRINCIPAL URBAN CENTERS, APPEAR ON NATIONAL TELEVISION, AND DEPART FOR CARACAS JUST BEFORE THE ELECTION. THE UNO IS COUNTING HEAVILY ON HIS POPULAR APPEAL TO STIMULATE THE OPPOSITION VOTE MARCH 10.

10. IF THE OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE ALLOWED TO REGISTER AND CAMPAIGN FREELY, IF DUARTE IS IN FACT PERMITTED TO RETURN AND DOES GENERATE INCREASED ENTHUSIASM AMONG THE UNO FOLLOWERS, AND IF THE VOTE COUNT IS RELATIVELY HONEST, THE CHANCES THAT THE PCN WILL AGAIN HOLD TWO-THIRDS OF THE SEATS IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY APPEAR SLIM. PCN LEADERS PRIVATELY ESTIMATE THAT THEY WILL WIN SOME 30 TO 32 SEATS, SHY OF THE 35 NEEDED TO TOTALLY CONTROL THE ASSEMBLY. OPPOSITION LEADERS, THEREFORE, ARE SOMEWHAT CONCERNED BY REPORTS THAT PCN SECRETARY GENERAL RODRIGUEZ PERSONALLY HAS PROMISED THE PRESIDENT THAT HE WILL DELIVER THE TWO-THIRDS BLOC AND WONDER WHAT TACTICS HE MIGHT HAVE IN MIND TO DO SO.
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